

FITNESS

Walk Your Way to Good Health

Walking is one of the easiest ways to add physical activity to your day. It is simple, convenient and doesn't require special clothing or equipment – just a pair of sturdy shoes. You can get started in three easy steps.

Almost anyone can walk for exercise, almost anywhere. It is easy to fit a walk into your day. You don't need special clothes or a gym membership. And walking has a low risk of injury. Walking can also help you lower your risk for cancer, heart disease, stroke, Type II diabetes and osteoporosis. Along with eating healthy foods in appropriate portions, walking can help you control your weight. Other benefits from regular walks include boosting energy, reducing stress, sleeping better and improving your mood.

Step 1. Get Ready

Before starting or changing your exercise program, talk to your doctor about a safe level of physical activity for you. Next, make sure you have walking shoes with a low rounded heel and flexible sole. They should support your arches, cushion your feet and be lightweight and ventilated. Remember to dress in layers that allow you to cool off or warm up as needed. When walking, always choose a safe route.

Step 2. Start Walking

Make it your goal to walk every day. If you are inactive now, start with a 10-minute walk everyday for a week. Add 5 minutes each week. In 10 weeks you'll be walking an hour a day. Start walking at a slow pace. After a few minutes, stop and stretch your hamstrings, thigh muscles and any other muscles that feel tight. Walk at a pace where your heart rate and breathing are faster than normal, but allows you to still carry on a conversation without any trouble. Pick up the pace as walking gets easier.

Step 3. Keep Walking

To make your walking program easy to stick to find a friend to walk with or form a walking group so you are less likely to skip your walk. Use a pedometer, which clips to your belt or clothing and counts the steps you take. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends walking 10,000 steps per day. With about 2,000 steps in a mile, that's about 5 miles a day. Have fun trying to increase the number of steps you take, no matter what your total is.

